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Sex workers' transnational and local motherhood: presence and/or absence?

Hanne Marlene Dahl & Marlene Spanger

Female migrants from economically poor countries increasingly work in better-off countries while leaving children in the sending countries to be cared for by other relatives or paid carers. This downside is often forgotten in the glorious celebration of globalization, which neglects the feminization of migration (Kofman 2003; Yeates 2009), the care drain (Hochschild 2003) and a feminized neo-colonialism (Sarvasy and Longo 2004). The separation of female migrants and their children produces suffering on both sides (Hochschild 2001, 2003), and migration erodes social solidarities in the sending communities (Isaksen, Devi and Hochschild 2008). One of the pragmatic solutions put forward to reduce this injustice is a changed migration policy that would allow these caregivers to bring their children with them:

> For social policy, it raises the issue of what we can do to reduce the hidden injuries of global capital. At the very least, we can call for arrangements by which children and perhaps other caregivers can follow mothers to their new place of work. (Isaksen, Devi and Hochschild 2008, 420)

Granting entry rights to the migrants' children would seem to reduce the sufferings for both the children and the separated mother (ibid.). It would acknowledge the interdependence of human relationships (Tronto 1993) and would be in line with recent developments in feminist theories on care and citizenship (Tronto 2004; Tronto, forthcoming; Longo and Sarvasy 2004) which advocate citizenship rights for migrating workers in relation to care both nationally and globally. EU citizens and migrants from outside the EU married to Danish citizens already have a right to bring their child or children into the country.

Acknowledging the need for rights to give and receive care, we want to relate this policy solution to experiences of single mothers involved in global care chains in Denmark. By focussing upon their experiences, we investigate the different ways of doing motherhood and end with a call for more differentiated policy solutions. Ideally we would like to continue a dialogue on 'thoughtful public answers' to the private costs of a global wage gap – a dialogue that started with the publication of 'Gender, Care work and Globalization: Local problems and transnational solutions in the Norwegian welfare state' by Isaksen (2007). To this dialogue we want to add knowledge of the downside of migration, of how single mothers and their children live in the new country. Bringing a child to a new country is not always an unproblematic solution. A migrant running a sports institute in Denmark attended by many Thai children describes the difficulties these children frequently face:

> Mom leaving for a long time and just takes him [the children]. Take him to here… She got new place, new person. New tradition. Then sometimes… not easy to accept, take time.

We ground our discussion in the stories of two female Thai migrants selling sex and living in Denmark: Khem and Nee. Unlike Isaksen, Devi and Hochschild (2008) our focus is not on their children. The two stories represent the downside of the global care chains where women are positioned as low-skilled workers with limited resources;[1] however, this does not mean that they have no agency, as will be seen.

1 In contrast to Khem and Nee, the upside of globalization consists of female professionals working in Europe as doctors or nurses (Isaksen 2007; Yeates 2009).

Khem is the story of the absentee mother, for her two children are being taken care of in Thailand by her grandmother and ex-husband. Nee is the story of the present mother having brought her daughter to live with her in Denmark. We analyse these two stories employing three different lenses: one from the literature on transnational motherhood; another from the theory of global care chains; and a third from the feminist literature on citizenship. The stories told by Khem and Nee reveal that there are no simple solutions to the problems of global care chains. This chapter investigates the different framings of motherhood both in a situation where the children are left behind and in a situation where the child is brought to the new country. Based upon fieldwork, this chapter analyses how single motherhood and caregiving are reorganized within the process of migration constrained by the citizenship rights and obligations of these female migrants. This chapter first introduces our theoretical framework and goes on to describe the Danish migration regime. Then, it outlines the methodology applied and in the next two sections analyses the stories of Khem and Nee. Finally, we conclude and reflect upon issues for further research.

The effect of globalizing processes

Our theoretical position is inspired by theories of transnational motherhood (Parreñas 2001; Sørensen 2002), global care chains (Hochschild 2001; Yeates 2009) and citizenship (Lister 1997; Yuval-Davis 2006). Our approach stresses simultaneously the agency of the female migrants through the different ways of performing motherhood in a given Danish migration regime and the potentially negative effects of global care chains.

A body of migration literature examines how gender identities and family ties are reconstructed in the process of migration regarding new formations of households, families and/or social networks (Basch et al. 1994; Levitt & Schiller 2004; Sørensen 2002; Sørensen & Guarnizo 2007).[2] The concept of transnational motherhood was introduced by Avila & Hondagneu-Sotelo (1997) in relation to female labour migration from economically poor to richer countries. It focussed on Latino women who leave children with relatives or local nannies while taking up domestic work in the US. They investigated how meanings of motherhood are constructed and how strategies for mothering have changed in transnational families, stressing that female migrants construct new definitions of good mothering through transformations of practices of mothering in order to stay in contact with their children. Parreñas (2001) refines the concept of transnational motherhood by seeing it as shaped by global socio-economic inequalities, social mobility and financial security, including the perspective of the children left behind. She reminds us that the children 'suffer from emotional costs of geographical distances' (ibid., 375) and that the relationship between mother and child is affected by the paradox that the financial security obtained by migration goes hand in hand with emotional insecurity by the absence of the mother. In particular, Parreñas (2001, 387) suggests that feelings of loss and pain in transnational families are social constructions intensified by notions of ideal Philippine motherhood. In many cases, the responsibility and the caregiving towards the children rely solely on the mother. A new concept of 'Skype mothering' (Lutz and Palenga-Möllenbeck 2009) has emerged, stressing a new way of doing transnational motherhood using new information technology such as Skype telephone calls, SMS's and e-mails. Summing up this literature, it perceives the lives of these

2 Even if it is only one person who goes abroad, the decision affects the remaining family members because of the redistribution of the migrant's domestic duties, child rearing, care, etc. (Levitt & Schiller 2004, 1016). Expenses related to migration and settlement in the receiving society are often met by the family from the same local community in the sending country. Thus migration becomes a family strategy.

female migrants as rather contradictory, complex and as involving agency. Mothering is an ongoing process of doing.

Hochschild, has developed the concept of 'global care chains', which are defined as: '…a series of personal links between people across the globe based on paid and unpaid work of caring' (2001, 131). In many ways, the concept of transnational motherhood and global care chains overlap by focussing on how female migration, care work and motherhood are linked together by the dynamics of global processes. The literature on global care chains takes a bottom-up perspective with special attention being given to the negative, exploitative effects of the transfer of care on the macro and micro levels. In her investigations of the migration of carers, Hochschild draws upon motherhood performed by Filipino mothers in the US (2001), and in a later article Isaksen, Devi and Hochschild (2008) apply this approach to Indian mothers working in the Gulf and the children left behind. In both places in the South, the locally prevailing discourse of motherhood as presence produces dissatisfaction and unhappiness amongst the migrating mothers and the children left behind (Hochshild, 2001; Isaksen, Devi and Hochschild 2008). The understanding of doing motherhood evident in Hochschild (2001) and Isaksen et al. (2008) highlights the locally produced dominant understandings of motherhood and its complexity. However, they are insufficiently attentive to the agency of transnational mothers in the new context. Here Yeates (2004; 2009) is useful as a supplement enabling us to see female Thai migrant sex workers as carers performing different kinds of motherhood, allowing for their potential agency in a particular migration regime by including both top-down (state) and bottom-up dimensions that affect the process of migration. Moreover, our approach necessitates a discussion of the nature of citizenship.

Broadly speaking, citizenship is membership of a community involving rights and responsibilities. Feminists have reformulated the classical notion of citizenship, de-gendering it (Lister 1997; Lister et al. 2007). Lister (1997) advocates a dynamic and inclusive understanding of citizenship to include care. This cannot only be translated into a right to receive care but must also encompass a right to give care, which is often understood as enabling the carer financially by state transfers (Knijn and Kremer 1997). However, a right for the mother to give care also requires the physical presence of her child, thus introducing social and political rights. People migrate and relate to more than one community, creating a more global, multilayered citizenship (Lister 1997; Yuval-Davis 2006). Relating to a community is in our view identical with belonging to it, which refers to an emotional attachment, a feeling of being 'at home' and 'safe' (Yuval-Davis 2006). Khem and Nee feel at home in various spatial contexts and belong to both the Thai and Danish community. Emotional attachment is a dynamic process, shaping as well as shaped by the prevailing politics of belonging. By 'politics of belonging', Yuval-Davis means the 'specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to particular collectivities that are, at the same time, themselves being constructed by these projects in very particular ways' (2006, 197).

Migration regimes

Lutz (2008, 2) defines a migration regime as 'the organisation and corresponding of cultural codes of social policy and practices', but here only the policies of migration in a broad sense, including policies on human trafficking and family unification, are investigated. This approach fits well with Yeates's (2009) framework for analysing the complexities of global care chains using four dimensions: preconditions (low skilled/high skilled); the recruitment of care workers either by formal means (state agencies) or through informal networks (friendship, family or local ties); external regulation (policies, social welfare and citizenship);

and the organization of the work (private/public, agents within the labour network). Following Yeates, we will briefly introduce how policies about family reunification, prostitution and human trafficking regulate the citizenship of female Thai migrant sex workers in terms of their care obligations and rights towards their children, and go on to briefly describe the organization of the work.

The Thais in this study are low-skilled workers recruited through informal networks consisting of acquaintances, family or local ties. They established contact in Denmark, obtained jobs, and/or were introduced to their future Danish husbands through informal networks. Marrying a Danish male citizen is the only way for them to overcome the strict Danish migration policy on residence permits. All of the migrants who figure in the material have acquired residence permits through such marriages. They have children either from former relationships in Thailand and/or with a Danish man. As in the story of Nee, some of the migrants bring their children to Denmark. In some cases they return to Thailand after staying for a period. Other children remain in Thailand, as in the story of Khem.

Global care chains are not only shaped by the family, forms of recruitment and labour opportunities; migration policies also play a major role. Compared to the other Nordic countries, Denmark has the most restrictive policy on residence permits for non-EU citizens. In 2007, the Danish government stipulated a number of demands and obligations – age, the size of the marital home, the married couple's livelihoods, and language training (Danish Immigration Service 2007, 24) – applying to migrants from a non-EU country who apply for residence permit through marriage.[3] After seven years of marriage with a Danish citizen, it is possible to gain a permanent residence permit. If the marriage breaks down before the seven years are up, the residence permit is automatically suspended and the migrant has to apply for a new permit (New to Denmark 2007). According to the Danish legislation on family reunification, the Thais have a right to bring in any children under the age of 15 from Thailand.[4] When the children are granted a residence permit they have a social right to receive care in forms of public crèches and kindergartens as well as free education. In order to bring their children, a number of obligations need to be met by the migrants and their Danish partners.[5]

According to the Danish government (New to Denmark 2010), the purpose of these social and economic obligations put on the parent and the Danish partner is to protect the interests of the child. The obligations encompass, for example, housing requirements (size of the marital home) and neither the migrant nor the partner is allowed to be on benefits.[6] In the case of the Thai migrant sex workers who one of the authors of this chapter (Spanger) has interviewed, the fathers of the children have been absent in nearly all cases. However in Khem's case, one of her children lives with the father.

This social group of female Thai migrants sell sexual services in massage parlours or bars. Besides selling sex, they hold low-skilled jobs as cleaners, kitchen assistants, masseuses, or

3 See Law on foreigners §§ 7–9.

4 However, granting residence permits for their children depends on the connection between the parents and the children, and is governed by the length of separation and the child's belonging to the sending society. Each application is processed individually.

5 None of the interviewees had children over fifteen years old when they applied for residence permits for their children.

6 In addition, the Danish authorities also 'consider whether the child is vulnerable to serious social problems in Denmark by identifying whether the family in Denmark has social problems' (New to Denmark 2010), for 'if one of the child's parents continues to reside in the country of origin […], and if the application for family reunification is submitted more than two years after the parent residing in Denmark meets the requirements for family reunification with a child, a special attachment requirement applies. This requirement stipulates that a residence permit will only be granted if the child has […] an attachment to Denmark sufficient to form the basis for successful integration in Denmark' (ibid.). This means that the other parent, who lives in the sending society, plays a central role in determining the rights of the migrant to bring the children.

factory workers. The turnover of low-skilled temporary jobs among these females is high. Some of them only work in the sex industry, whereas others return to the sex industry having once been employed as cleaners or dishwashers. In particular, private forms of loan systems and long shifts define their sex work, while working evenings and nights characterizes their work in general. This can create problems if the migrants care for the children in Denmark, which is why some of them hire other Thais to take care of their children. Nonetheless, the Thai migrant sex workers Spanger has interviewed give the impression that the massage parlours also function as social meeting-points for the sex workers and their friends; places where they can eat together, watch television and play cards. The border between working life and spare time is blurred, and in many cases such kinds of lifestyle hardly make any allowances for caring for children during the day or at night. Both Khem and Nee sell sex at massage parlours or clinics that also function as a space where they established social relationships with clients and other female Thais.

The legislation concerning the selling of sex in Denmark is ambiguous, since it is not forbidden for persons over eighteen years old to sell or buy sexual services. Since the 1970s the Danish authorities have perceived sex work as a social problem, and a number of social and health programmes offer counselling and help (Spanger 2008). Regardless of whether they are undocumented or documented migrants in Denmark, all migrants who sell sex are seen as potential victims of human trafficking (Spanger 2008). The Danish penal code § 262a on human trafficking and the government's action plan on combating human trafficking are of great importance for the female Thai migrant sex workers who have been granted temporary residence permits. One of the purposes of the action plan is to implement a repatriation programme and offer health and social counselling to migrant sex workers. Nonetheless, very few migrant sex workers have accepted the repatriation programme. This group of documented migrants are caught between the penal code on human trafficking and the legislation on family reunification, given that the female Thai migrant sex workers are not interested in the repatriation programme and at the same time their residence permit relies solely on their marriage with their Danish husbands. This places them and their children, who live in Denmark, in a vulnerable position.

Methodology

The material produced by study fieldwork consisted of observations and interviews (Hasse 2000; Kvale 1994) with Thai female migrant sex workers in Denmark who have children in their care. The purpose of the fieldwork was to identify how they signify care and motherhood within the process of transnational migration. In order to gain access to this highly sensitive field, Spanger conducted fieldwork via a programme targeted at migrant sex workers. The objective of the programme was to provide information about safe sex, to offer support and counselling about social and health problems, and to mediate contacts with the relevant public authorities such as housing offices and social services. In particular, Spanger joined a social worker in her work with the migrants for a period of four months. By doing so, Spanger had the opportunity to meet the sex workers in different places and later interview some of them about their everyday lives. Conducting participant observations in a field that is often conditioned by stigmatization, prejudices and various social problems, Spanger was not allowed to tape conversations between the social worker and the migrants, and instead she took notes. Consequently, the presentation of two stories of Khem and Nee are different in terms of form. These case stories are representative of the narratives told by the single mother informants.

Eighteen in-depth interviews were undertaken, most of them with women working in the sex industry, but also with key figures in the Thai community in Denmark. Inspired by Kvales's (1994) interview technique, a thematically semi-structured guide was used to structure the interviews around issues of migration, motherhood and care. Our analytical strategy consists of questions developed on the basis of five dimensions (citizenship, care, (single) motherhood, transnational links, and agency) derived from our theoretical framework. In particular, and inspired by Dahl (2000), we focus upon meaning and ambiguity concerning the migrants' notions and practices of motherhood.

The Story of Khem

Spanger met Khem at her workplace, a traditional massage clinic, where she performs traditional massage and a few sexual services. It was through outreach social work by the programme that Spanger came into contact with Khem. She is 36 years old and migrated to Denmark in 1999. It was through her second husband, an Israeli man who already lived in Denmark, that she became familiar with the country. Today, Khem holds a residence permit in Denmark and she has just separated from her Israeli husband. These days she mostly lives at the massage clinic, since she has no home of her own due to her recent divorce. Khem is a single mother and her two daughters age 14 and 15 from her first marriage live in Thailand. After she migrated to Denmark both daughters moved to live with their grandmother. At present, one of the daughters lives with their father, a decision made by Khem's mother. Thus, Khem's transnational mothering is defined by a global care chain where her children are cared for by their grandmother and father in Thailand.

> Khem: I have my mother and my family and my two daughters that I have to take care of and I decided [to go abroad]. Before, I didn't work with such kinds of job [massage]. I choose Denmark because I like a kind of freedom…
>
> Marlene: How did you began your life in Denmark?
>
> Khem: I worked. My [second] husband made a contract so I worked for his company. My husband took care of me and I worked. We had a clothing shop. We did imports–exports. I was lucky because my husband teaches me correct [Danish], told me how it should be done – I was lucky. He is my family.
>
> Marlene How often do you contact your daughters?
>
> Khem: I call them every day. I buy these cards [prepaid mobile phone cards]. I call my mother. I have her phone number and my daughter's number. And then I call my other daughter in Bangkok.
>
> Marlene: What do you talk about when you talk with your daughters?
>
> Khem: About her life… if she has any problems then we take care of it together. My mother she is little bit difficult because she is just like old people towards the child. I tell my mother that she shouldn't yell or scream at her, but instead she has to listen and talk to my daughter's teacher if something happen. I tell her that she has to listen to what she [her daughter] says and what the teacher says. And then I ask my child what is going on. I try to explain so she [the grandmother] understands. If they hit my child I get sad and cry and the child cries, too.
>
> Marlene: Have you considered bringing you children to Denmark?
>
> Khem: Of course! But [sighs heavily] … some families [meaning other female Thai migrants] here in the country are lucky because their husbands accept that they have the child here. But my husband doesn't want… it is not because he doesn't want to accept them. But he told me that it is better for Thais [probably meaning the children] to stay in their country. I think he is selfish because I want my child close to me. My husband, I don't think he accepts it and he talks in another way because he has two sons. …they are adults now 30 and 27 years old.

The way she does transnational motherhood has changed during the migration process determined by her former work in her ex-husband's company. Khem migrated as a single

mother leaving her children behind. She re-married – an Israeli man residing in Denmark – and visits Thailand and her daughters quite frequently due to the nature of her job. Since she divorced him, she can no longer afford regular trips to Thailand. Thus, her possibilities to exercise face-to-face motherhood are reduced, so she performs transnational motherhood by non-local practices in a form of Skype-motherhood. Through the daily telephone contacts Khem tries to get a solid knowledge of their daily lives and any troubles, and discusses solutions with them.

> Khem: …my husband, he doesn't want to… it is very hard to ask: can you send money to my children? Can you send money to my mother? Can you send money for my children's schooling? … he says 'no'… Since I went abroad seven years ago the last time I was home was three years ago.
>
> Marlene: But before?
>
> Khem: Every second week together with my husband I went to Thailand. I was helping him buy clothes. Every time I was in Thailand I booked a hotel room for my daughter and my mother. Every day we stayed over together.

Sending remittances has caused problems between Khem and her husband, which is not unusual in marriages between Thai women and Danish men who find it difficult to understand that their wives have financial obligations towards their families in Thailand. As in Khem's case, the migrant often disagrees with their spouse regarding the amount of financial remittances. This new form of mothering, Skype mothering, allows Khem to understand herself as a caring mother and inscribe herself in a discourse of motherhood that stresses emotional closeness. She is, in our understanding, an absent though emotionally present mother, she shares feelings with her children and discusses their problems on the phone, and is in this sense present as a mother. She obviously misses them, but she has not brought them to Denmark for a variety of reasons. When still married, her Israeli husband opposed the idea, and her rights to bring the children to Denmark relied on his consent given that both Khem and her children were dependant on him with regard to housing and the family finances. Both Khem and he would have had obligations towards the children. After she has been granted a permanent residence permit, she is independent of her ex-husband and his consent. However, Khem would have trouble meeting the social and financial obligations related to the children because of her long working hours, and after the divorce she has not had her own apartment to be her children's family home. Thus, she would have difficulty caring for her children in Denmark in the way the Danish authorities demand.

Khem's notion of mothering is defined by financial responsibility, and emotional and social presence regarding the form of upbringing of the children. Being a caring transnational mother, she experiences the clash between two different ideals of care: the traditional one performed by her mother; and her ideal of care as based on dialogue and trust. She is ambiguous, for though she accepts the traditional motherhood position by letting her mother take one important decision on her behalf concerning where one of her daughters will live, the fact that she interferes in how her mother brings up the children indicates that she takes an active part in how her children should be educated in Thailand. Despite that, she misses being with her children, she stresses that living in Denmark and being her own woman has given her a kind of independence for structuring her working life (she is the owner of the massage clinic) and her leisure time. Thus Khem's brand of transnational mothering is a complex and contrasting construction determined by loss, some financial security, and independence. We suggest that the complexity is also a result of the constraints of the migration regime. The combination of Khem's low-skilled position in the labour market, her difficulties in caring for her children due to her working schedule, and her former Israeli husband's disapproval regarding bringing the children to Denmark constitute a very difficult situation. Khem is a

physically absent but emotionally present Skype mother. She inscribes herself in contradictory ideas of motherhood though stressing the modern, dialogical and freedom-oriented form of motherhood determined by her transnational migration. Care is performed in various ways – not face to face – but through seeing and taking responsibility for needs for care, to use Tronto's (1993) terminology. Khem does motherhood in a different way to Nee, who is the physically present but emotionally absent mother, as we will see.

The Story of Nee

Spanger followed Nee, and sometimes her daughter Sank, through the programme, which involved weekly contact with the social worker attached to the programme. This meant that Spanger met her, and sometimes the daughter, in different situations and settings. Nee is 35 years old and arrived in Denmark in 2001. A short time after her arrival Nee met a Danish man whom she married. The contact was established through her sister, who already lived in Denmark. Having one daughter, Sank, from a former relationship in Thailand, Nee is a single mother. Her aunt and uncle and to an extent her ex-mother-in-law took care of Sank after Nee went abroad. In 2004 Nee brought her daughter to Denmark when she was 12 years old. In 2005 she filed for a divorce from her Danish husband and applied for a residence permit. After Nee left her Danish ex-husband in 2005 she, as a single mother, acquired a rented flat for her and Sank from social services. Shortly after, Nee met a new Danish man.

> Social worker: Why did you go to Denmark?
>
> Nee: My older sister, who lived in Denmark offered me a job as babysitter. In reality, I could help cleaning.
>
> *Nee continues by saying she missed her daughter and wanted to bring her to Denmark. At the same time, Nee stresses that she did not want to bring her daughter the first time round. Every time she left her daughter after a visit in Thailand her daughter wouldn't let her go. In addition, her ex-mother-in-law did not want to take care of Sank any more. During the three years Nee lived in Denmark and Sank in Thailand, Nee and her new Danish husband visited her daughter once a year.*

Bringing Sank to Denmark has not been unproblematic for Nee, or indeed for Sank. Living in Denmark where Nee works during the day as a kitchen assistant, and sometimes keeps her older sister company at her massage parlour at night, leaves hardly any time for taking care of her daughter. Besides, Nee has a new boyfriend with whom she often stays overnight. This means that Sank is alone all night and in the mornings. Every afternoon Nee sees Sank and gives her some money for food. Such a turbulent life has caused a troublesome relationship between Nee and Sank. Quite often, Sank plays truant from school together with another Thai girl, who is in similar situation.

> *The social worker knows that Nee has a new boyfriend with whom she often stays overnight. In an insistent voice, the social worker underscores to Nee that it is important she is at home in the morning, afternoon and evening so Sank is not alone. Likewise, the social worker tells Nee that it is important that they eat together, that she talks to her daughter, does things together with her, holds her and gives her a hug. Nee does not say anything, she just nods. The social worker continues, asking: 'Why do you choose living with your boyfriend rather than living with your daughter? You can't just chuck her over!' Nee's only answer is 'Sank cannot change. She looks like her father too much. She does not behave as I tell her to and she pull faces in front of me'. Nee emphasizes to me and the social worker that she just wants her daughter to go to school and get an education so she can take care of herself. Nee continues: 'It is like that I can't focus on the job when I have problems with Sank, when she doesn't listen to me.' At the same time Nee says that she cannot afford to take care of her daughter. This reply is not acceptable to the social worker who says: 'You need to have close contact to your child and you are obliged to pay maintenance for your child. There is no security or love in that kind of institution [24-hour care centre].' Nee is considering sending Sank back to Thailand to her father. Her younger sister suggested that the*

state could take responsibility for Sank. To the social worker, Nee stresses that she did a lot for Sank when she brought her to Denmark. She repeats this several times during the meeting.

Nee's story reveals some of the complications that arise when the migrants bring their children to Denmark. Nee's transnational migration process is based on informal networks consisting of her sisters already living in Denmark. They helped her settle down in Denmark, find a job and make contact with her former Danish husband. Marrying a Danish man, Nee solved the housing problem for her and her daughter until she filed for a divorce. The global care chain involves her mother caring for her daughter in Thailand. This care chain changed when Nee brought her daughter to Denmark, which was possibly due to the Danish migration policy on family reunification.

After Nee brought Sank to Denmark, her motherhood changed from one of transnational motherhood to local motherhood; she is no longer part of a global care chain with her child, although she could still be part of a global care chain with regard to her parents. At the point Nee applied for a residence permit for Sank, she depended on the consent of her former Danish husband with the regard to their housing and finances, which placed her in a vulnerable position. Nee no longer depends on her Danish ex-husband for her social rights; she is able to receive various social benefits enabling her to meet her financial and social obligations to Sank. However, according to the Danish social authorities, Nee has troubles meeting emotional and social obligations towards Sank. In particular, Nee's story reflects a cultural clash of different ways of doing motherhood. Unlike Khem, Nee, having brought her child to Denmark, is the physically present mother, but she is emotionally absent. Nee is confronted by the dominating discourse of motherhood within social work in Denmark that constructs motherhood as a female subject who is emotionally present, takes an active part in the everyday life of the children and is generally involved. The social worker explains to Nee how she should behave as a (good) mother, which disciplines Nee to a particular ideal of the good mother. This discourse of motherhood is quite different from Nee's way of doing motherhood, stressing facilitative aspects such as housing, food and access to education.

During the process from transnational motherhood to local motherhood, her motherhood changes from a Skype motherhood to a local, physically present motherhood. Despite the change of motherhood, emotional insecurity and financial security are still characteristic of Nee's situation –just in another form. Placing high expectations on their children, the female Thai migrant sex workers' lives sometimes make it difficult for them to take care of their children, as in the case of both Nee and Khem. Nee expects a kind of gratitude from Sank given that her daughter has the opportunity to go to school and get an education. In practice, however, there is no space for Sank in Nee's everyday life in Denmark. Being a low-skilled migrant, Nee finds selling sex an attractive alternative to jobs as a cleaner or kitchen assistant. Nee works late at a massage parlour or helps her sister there. Consequently, her working life conflicts with her caring for Sank, despite her rights to bring Sank to Denmark. Nee brought her daughter to Denmark, but her physical presence has not elicited emotional care, and thus emotional insecurity and financial security still characterize her motherhood. Frustration dominates their relationship.

Conclusion

When female migrants bring their children to the receiving country – in this case Denmark – the care chain involving the children disappears. Other care chains relating to parents or parents-in-law might still exist, but they have not been investigated in this study. Despite representing the downside of a global care chain and life in an unequal, globalized world, Khem's and Nee's agency are manifested in their Skype and local motherhoods. Organizing

the ongoing contact with their children through transnational communication, filing for divorce and organizing their own lives reflects their agency. They have both obtained some sort of financial security for themselves and their children. Khem performs emotional presence and physical absence through Skype motherhood, whereas Nee is emotionally absent and largely physically absent, despite the geographical proximity of her daughter. Khem and Nee do motherhood in different ways. Also at play is the confrontation between Nee's understanding of a good mother and another one represented by the Danish social worker.

How a child responds to a new country depends upon the child's life so far, its relationship with other caregivers, its reactions to change and the motherhood performed. For this group of female migrants, bringing children into the receiving country also depends on two other crucial factors: housing conditions and the consent of their new husbands, as shown in a study by Sørensen and Guarnizo (2007). Due to this complexity, policy solutions are not simple. There is a need for more differentiated policy instruments that go beyond stating rights to offering concrete help to perform motherhood under their specific conditions of work – help where the disciplining effects are minimalized by not uncritically reproducing naturalized discourses of motherhood.

These two stories prompt us to reflect on the relationship between rights and obligations. We have not questioned the necessity of a right to bring the migrants' children to the new country. Instead it is our intention to question the often naturalized relationship between rights and obligations inherent in the two stories. Rights are often codifications of obligations such as expectations concerning migrating mothers. The different ways of doing motherhood seem to be at odds with traditional and local understandings of good motherhood as physical presence, which is why policy solutions should be wary of reproducing or facilitating one form of doing motherhood over another.

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